

Knowing When To Stop and Reassess



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My wife's red, '65 Mustang convertible was looking good after a fine wax job, except for one thing: It drooped slightly in the rear. "No problem," I thought; "now I have an excuse to replace those old, worn-out, rear leaf springs with some new, heavy-duty ones."

After getting the replacement springs, I cleared the garage for the removal and replacement procedure. I did my ORM, starting with making sure I had two proper-capacity jack stands to keep the rear of the car suspended. I also chocked the front tires, and I had all the tools and PPE I needed.

I first took off the front "hanger bolt" nuts so I could remove the springs' hanger bolts. The nuts came off without a problem. The first bolt, however, was stuck and wouldn't slide out of the spring eyelet, so I grabbed a hammer. After banging away with no results, I got a bigger hammer but still had no luck. I then took a hacksaw and tried to saw the bolt at the base on both sides of the spring. This method was

working nicely, but there was one drawback. Based on my calculations, I would need a week to complete the task, and my hands, arms and shoulders weren't going to last that long.

My solution to this problem was to call a squadronmate—you know, the guy who has all the cool tools and ideas. I borrowed his 1,200-watt, 2,600-stroke-per-minute, DeWalt reciprocating saw, then slid back under the car and resumed sawing. Metal flakes were flying, and the entire car was vibrating. "Great!" I thought. "At last, I'm making some progress."

It turned out that some of the metal dust flying around was coming from the saw blade—but not a problem. My buddy had supplied plenty of blades. While changing the blade, I noticed the jack stand on my side of the car didn't look right. The safety pin nearly had backed out of the stand. A little more sawing would have resulted in more than 2,000 pounds of Detroit metal landing on my side!

I lifted the car with a hydraulic jack, repositioned the jack-stand's safety pin, and then duct-taped the pins in both stands so they couldn't back out. I finished the job without further incident.

What did I learn from that event? Spending about 20 more dollars would have bought me jack stands that had non-backing secure safety pins. The best equipment always costs more, but where safety is concerned, it's worth every penny.

The biggest lesson from this experience was that I hadn't stopped to think how using the power saw was going to change things. My simple plan of using a wrench had been modified, but I hadn't used ORM to reassess the new hazards and risks involved. Bottom line: When your plans change, you must reevaluate the possible repercussions. ■

Resources:

- <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/orm/> [*Operational Risk Management (ORM)*]
- <http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/orm/generalorm/introduction/> [*Operational Risk Management*]
- http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0IBQ/is_2000_August/ai_68535039 [*ORM: Keeping Sailors Safe One Step at a Time*]